

Preface

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

Our schools need leaders who have vision and are prepared to act on it—leaders who continually promote growth and explore alternative approaches to learning, community building, problem solving, and teacher empowerment. When we find creative, talented, and visionary leaders, we want them to bring their knowledge, talent, and skills to every aspect of their principalship.

Sometimes, when leaders share more of themselves, people may feel confused and even threatened. Although leaders often are chosen because of their strengths, when they act authentically (consistently working from their beliefs and passions), the school community may critique and try to modify the very attributes that distinguished them.

In the United States, we may be facing a crisis of leadership in education. The U.S. Department of Labor projected that 40 percent of the country's 93,200 principals are nearing retirement. Sixty-six percent of respondents to a National Association of Elementary School Principals survey indicated that they will retire or be retired by 2012. School superintendents are saying that they are not getting the quantity or caliber of applicants they did in the past. Many new principals have less teaching and administrative experience than their predecessors. Now more than ever, new principals need mentoring and coaching from their experienced colleagues.

This book serves to encourage and support leaders in being authentic and reflecting on their practice and to educate school communities about effective leadership. It is important for staff, teachers, administrators, families, and the larger community to understand that to be effective, leaders must lead in their own ways—and that the resulting changes in the schools are in the

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service of promoting an even better education for all students. When people understand this, they will be more inclined to work through their differences, pooling talents and resources in the spirit of working together.

MENTORING THROUGH STORIES FOR ASPIRING, EXPERIENCED, AND REFLECTIVE PRINCIPALS

I wrote *Are You Sure You're the Principal? A Guide for New and Aspiring Leaders* to share craft wisdom in a personal way, through stories and commentary. Stories make ideas about leadership easily accessible to readers interested in the practical as well as the theoretical. Readers tell me that they identify with the situations described in the book. *Are You Sure You're the Principal?* chronicles my path in leadership, from the excruciating challenges of my first year as a principal through my career as an effective and respected leader, a trainer of leaders, and a leader of a leadership organization.

This book illustrates leadership that is authentic and reflective. I share my insights about intention, communication, conflict, and building community to provide opportunities for readers to do self-reflection as well as to discuss their beliefs and practice. Study guides at the end of the book include quotes about leadership from 15 leaders, activists, and writers and offer questions to ponder or discuss that refer to the entire book and each individual chapter. These study guides are designed for individual readers, aspiring and experienced principals who are studying educational administration and leadership, and study groups of practitioners.

Readers tell me that my self-reflection has inspired them to explore past and present leadership experiences. Understanding these influences on their current practice helps aspiring, new, and experienced principals enhance their effectiveness and job satisfaction.

I wish there had been a book like this when I first became a principal—a book in which an experienced leader shared her or his craft wisdom in a personal way, through stories. I hope that you'll find that reading my book is like sitting with an experienced colleague and hearing some ways that she makes sense of her practice.

Two organizing principles structure this book. Core issues of leadership are named in chapter titles and illustrated and discussed

through stories; the evolution of a leader is also portrayed. Commentary, artwork, dialogue, correspondence, and other writings punctuate the stories.

FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Aspiring administrators need to think about a variety of ways of leading in order to discover what is congruent with their values and educational philosophy. Initially, they may be most concerned about the challenges facing principals and candid reflections of an experienced principal. Practicing administrators and school leaders identify with the issues presented in this book. Principals have said that they resonated with the feelings that were described. Anyone interested in the experience of someone atypical of the role at the time of her experience, or a relational approach to leadership, may find these stories engaging, whether the reflections affirm, inform, or provoke the reader's thinking. There are many more books about educational leadership written by men than by women, so both men and women may be interested in a woman's reflection on her career and growth. Parents are often curious about the schools their children attend and welcome more insight into school management and leadership. Teachers who wish to expand the lens through which they view their own school leaders may find insight in reading about another principal's reflection on practice. Leaders in other fields, such as business, may benefit from this book; seeing leadership in another context provides a way to clarify and expand their concept of leadership. In addition, these stories offer a powerful invitation for all readers to reflect on leadership and the importance of being authentic.

What's New in This Second Edition

Chapters have been rewritten and in some cases reorganized and retitled. Study guides for each chapter and a study guide for all chapters have been added. A concluding chapter is also new to this edition.

I hope that this edition prompts people to discuss leadership with others in courses, study groups, books groups, and colleague-to-colleague. Sharing and reflecting on each other's experiences

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and beliefs about leadership can be enormously challenging and affirming. Discussing and possibly disagreeing with something written or shared in conversation can be a powerful form of professional development. Promoting reflection to enhance practice is the work I most enjoy doing now, through either mentoring, coaching, teaching, or writing. I wrote this book to serve people interested in such reflection and hope that you find it does.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Are You Sure You're the Principal?

I have never believed in stereotypes. I have fought against them my whole life. But if you had asked me when I first became a principal to describe a leader, a stereotypical character would have emerged. It would have been someone who acted and influenced, someone who commanded respect. It would have been a prominent presence whose opinions were known, a person who could handle any situation.

This first chapter is about coming to terms with stereotypes and distortions, beginning with my own. These stories are about learning that regardless of what I presented, people's expectations of me may have altered their perceptions. My early experiences as a principal confirmed that becoming the educational leader of a school involves a lot more than simply being appointed to the position.

Chapter 2: Working Through Conflict

The stories in this chapter are about conflict, communication, and the effect of power on both. Even though I could teach students ways to resolve conflicts with their peers, I found it much more difficult to identify, understand, and work through the conflicts I was having with staff members. Here issues of roles and power were constantly present. Some of our interactions were excruciating. My efforts to be authentic were not always understood or welcomed. Conflict, isolation, and group dynamics have, at times, undermined, but also strengthened, my resolve to be part of and lead a school community I respected and to earn the respect of its members.

Chapter 3: Communicating Who We Are and What We Believe

I reflect on ways that I concealed or revealed my feelings and thoughts during various times in my career and why I had developed these behaviors. I consider how to be more forthcoming in the interest of clarity and because I intuitively knew that authentic leadership required the ability to express outrage or tell truths.

Chapter 4: Building Community

We all need recognition and acceptance. The stories in this chapter reflect what I have done as a leader to help others learn about self-acceptance and acceptance of others. While hiring new staff to the school community and promoting teacher development through self-reflection, I focused on trust building and the necessity of finding common ground.

Over time, I moved from trying to fix things alone to facilitating joint problem solving and group decision making. By reflecting on how my disposition and action affected the outcomes, I learned that empowerment and innovation require leadership that inspires and is built on a foundation of trust.

Chapter 5: Advisers, Mentors, and Allies

The stories in this chapter are about guidance, support, and affirmation. Being reminded of our traits and abilities can keep us from getting bogged down by confusion and self-doubt in challenging times. For beginners, mentors are invaluable teachers and supporters. But even experienced leaders need to be validated, to seek support, and to recognize and accept it when it is offered. The fulfillment that comes to those who mentor is often one of the most rewarding aspects of their careers. Taking the next steps in our evolution as leaders and encouraging others to do the same is how we can nourish and sustain leadership that is authentic.

Chapter 6: Reflecting on a Career: Committing to Pursue Professional Passion

Principals may at times reconsider their commitment to the role or think about being a principal elsewhere. They may also be

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enticed to consider other roles in education. This chapter seeks to raise issues of career fulfillment and things to consider when reflecting on goals, preferences, and opportunities. Some principals may be best served by making changes in their work and others by recommitting to being a principal.

Study Guides

A study guide for use with all chapters and study guides related to each chapter are included at the end of the book. They provide information from educational researchers and writers that are connected with key ideas in the book. These guides may be used for self-reflection, for group discussion or analysis, and for extending understanding of what it means to be a principal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With deep affection I acknowledge my father, Jerry Villani, and the memory of my grandmother, Catherine Villani, for their ongoing love, support, and belief in me. My father's confidence in me, urging me to keep learning and reaching further, helped me to achieve what sometimes seemed impossible. Another's confidence is, I believe, the best form of empowerment. I thank Greta Morrione, my teacher at age 10, who made us write a story every day. At the time I panicked, but my mother sat with me and advised me to "write it just as you would say it." For such good advice, and many tearful writing sessions at the kitchen table, I fondly remember my mother, Helen Hartzman Villani. In addition, I thank Mr. Burns, who signaled to me that my writing was worth sharing with more people when he chose my essay for the high school yearbook.

I benefited tremendously from Sharon Lowenstein's undivided attention and guidance as I began writing stories about my work. Laura Kranis was my writing coach as I wrote more stories, made a proposal to book publishers, and then created this book. Laura's thought-provoking questions led me to deeper understandings about my experiences and myself, and through her coaching I was able to improve my writing.

Receiving a phone call from Gracia Alkema, then the president of Corwin Press, two weeks after I sent her a book proposal was a totally unexpected and warm welcome to publishing. Robb

Clouse, the acquisitions editor who led me through the process of publishing the first edition of this book, has been thoughtful about my work and most kind. I am thankful for their nurturing and encouragement. I deeply appreciate Lizzie Brenkus's and Robb Clouse's support to do a second edition of this book. Deb Stollenwerk's advice and advocacy as the editor of this second edition have been particularly valuable because she understood my intent and writing very soon after she joined the project. Veronica Stapleton made the final stages of copyediting and proofs checking a painless process, for which I am ever grateful. Douglas Rife, Corwin's former president, conveyed caring and respect each time we met and affirmed my pleasure in being a Corwin author.

The physical process of writing can be a strain on one's body. I thank Mark Dynan, Mary Benkert, and Tony Phillips for care and suggestions through those challenges.

My deeply felt gratitude goes to Nancy Bronson, Marlyn Miller, and Susan Zellman-Rohrer for their nurturing support and assistance on the first edition I wrote, and Dan Conley, Rose Feinberg, and Kathleen Sciarappa for their review of my second edition manuscript and practical suggestions about ways to enhance the value of the study guides. Henry Damon, my husband, has shown his support in many ways, including running 100 feet of electrical cord so I could write outdoors, making more than his share of suppers, helping me to clarify my thinking about leadership, and reading the resulting revised manuscripts. Special thanks to Kathleen Sciarappa, Rose Feinberg, and Adam Tanney for sharing well-chosen resources I used in the study guides. My NECEL buddies have offered almost 30 years of wisdom, wit, and camaraderie. For long-term support and encouragement, my appreciation to Gwen Brooks, Cindy Dubea, Carol Harrington, Vickie Hornus, Jo Kelleher, Helen Regan, and Susan Stevenson. What I learned by the examples of two NECEL colleagues who became the dearest of friends and passed on prematurely, Marlyn Miller and Betty Allen, continue to influence me in profound ways.

I cherish the response George Graham, the superintendent who took a chance on me for my first principalship, spontaneously made: "Sometimes getting a grievance means you are doing something right." Roland Barth's warm endorsement of my work, in both this book and one I later wrote on mentoring and induction programs for new principals, underscores the work of his career-supporting principals.

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I've acknowledged some of the people who influenced me and supported my writing, and the people who directly helped me make this book be my very best. How do I express my appreciation for the impact of so many others throughout my life? To my family, friends, colleagues, instructors, students, and their families who have taught, guided, challenged, mentored, taken a chance on, helped, accepted, valued, and encouraged me—to all of them, my heartfelt appreciation.

Susan Villani

Corwin Press would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the work:

Randel Beaver
Superintendent
Archer City ISD
Archer City, TX

Stephen Hegner
Principal
Brady Middle School
Pepper Pike, OH

Patrick J. Bingham
Director of Human
Resources
Petersburg City Public
Schools
Petersburg, VA

Ann Porter
Retired Elementary
Principal
Grand Forks Public
Schools
Grand Forks, ND

Steve Gruenert
Professor
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Terre Haute, IN

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Turlock, CA